Neither Mike nor Onyx had expected *this* to happen. One moment the duo were following the pathway back towards their shared campsite. Then the next they unintentionally strayed off that path and into a deeper part of the forest. This had brought the two of them into stumbling upon a sizable clearing that contained a rather massive tree in the middle of it.

No hindsight was needed to know that their discovery was more than just the word *weird* could describe. The ground of the clearing had visibly thick roots that all led up to the central tree. Surrounding these roots were many upon *many* fruits of varying types and species. Apples, bananas, mangos, you name it and it was probably somewhere on the ground. And of course Mike and Onyx, curious as ever, needed to pry deeper into the clearing to investigate this strange phenomenon.

They had tried their best not to cause any damage to the surrounding flora, and their careful treading towards the tree had brought up more questions than answers. The fruit strewn across the forest floor was in the most ripe, *pristine* condition that fruit could be. It all had stock photo levels of picturesqueness. Once they got close enough to the tree itself they both had discovered that it was far from a normal tree as well. They had both noticed that it had the appearance of a willow tree, which aren't commonly fruiting plants, but on closer inspection it was proven that it also had various species of fruit hanging from its branches. And the sheer size of it had furthered the air of impossibility that surrounded this entire grove.

Then Mike had the brilliant idea to make an attempt to pull off one of the lower hanging fruits of the tree. He claimed that he just wanted to see how it would taste. Onyx hadn't objected at the time, but perhaps he should have if he knew what was about to happen would happen.

In truth it was a rather odd chain of events. Mike had decided to make an attempt on a strawberry that he presumed would be just barely in reach of him if he climbed the tree a little. Meanwhile Onyx had elected to watch the young man attempt to claw his way up a small portion of the tree. This had led to him noticing that the branches and vines of the tree seemed to *move*. It was subtle at first, a level of movement that he had construed as the wind, but as time passed and Mike got closer to the berry it became increasingly noticeable that the branches of the foliage were actually moving towards him. This was also when Onyx himself noticed the feeling of a vine managing to snake itself beneath his jeans and under the crus of one of his legs.

Of course by the time Onyx had realized any of this going on it was a bit too late. In just seconds the tree’s branches had taken hold of Mike before the man could take hold of the strawberry. Meanwhile, Onyx had concurrently been hoisted into the tree by *multiple* vines that had managed to elude his gaze. That's what had brought them both to where the two of them were now. Held up in the crown of some kind of sentient tree by its branches and vines. At least they could still *see* each other, and whatever this overgrown shrub was had the courtesy to

ensnare the two guys in extremely partial cocoons (or perhaps makeshift hammocks) of wood and plant matter. Although their wrists and ankles were wrapped up so they were both effectively trapped.

"So are we just stuck here until someone finds us?" Mike asked, his positioning noticeably a foot or so above Onyx's.

"I mean… if someone *died* here I'd assume we'd have found bones or something," Onyx reasoned. "Personally, having my ankle almost shattered by a living tree was not part of my plans for this trip…"

"Now you see why I don't like camping!"

"I don't think any of this is camping's fault."

The duo proceeded to spend some time bantering to ease their nerves. Although feeling any sense of calm was a challenge when they both could feel either tree bark (Mike) or leaves (Onyx) groping their backs. Then a few minutes into their ordeal any hope for soothing was broken as Onyx had heard Mike suddenly yelp in pain followed by an odd statement from the guy.

"I think the tree just bit my neck!"

Onyx was about to ask for details, but then he felt a vine literally burrow into his own neck. Then in an instance both of them heard the sound of… something neither could identify echo within their minds.

'*Rest now. You shall serve a new purpose soon…*'

A weird sensation filled the both of them after that. An odd numbness that spread across their entire bodies as if both men had been exposed to anesthesia in a pre-op.

"D-did you hear that…?" Mike asked warily. He felt unnaturally warm and he wasn't sure why.

Despite Onyx's placement below Mike he still gave a nod. He was focused on this sensation of *bloating* in his stomach. It felt so full for some reason. "Yeah, I did…"

A few seconds passed and a nulled pressure had soon begun setting in within Mike's entire body. A strange straining in his muscle mass as he felt *something* get added into it that wasn't there before. So much of that something actually, as if he himself was being filled in more ways

than one. It was such a weird feeling, but something about it had given a sensation of comfort. Even if he could also feel his skin get a certain tenderness to it that it hadn't had before.

Then there had been the sense of straining in the young man's button-up. The top-most buttons increasingly felt tight over his chest as each second passed, and it didn't take very long for a few to scatter from their eyelets. Mike could only feel flustered as, despite his position, he could still look down just enough to see what had caused the breaking. It was his chest, but it didn't look like it. What he expected was going to be thick pectorals was instead a smooth, flat yet thick bloating in his chest. His skin looked so *red* and the smoothness was oddly shiny in the dim forest light. Furthermore instead of the sparse chest hair he usually had he was greeted with the sight of *seeds*. So many seeds emerging from his glistening flesh.

"U-*urgh*," Mike heaved. Why did it suddenly feel like a challenge to speak? "M-my chest… so… big…"

Onyx had heard the statement and looked upwards. While the two were very much held captive by the tree, there were still multiple wide gaps within their partial cocoons that allowed the duo to look at each other when needed. And this was *needed*, a look of surprise forming on the punkish man's face as he saw Mike's condition. That guy's upper torso was absolutely red and swelling up, and from his position it seemed as if their hands had regressed into simple nubs that were quickly shrinking into their body. Their pants also seemed to have a noticeable sagging that seemed to imply the exact same thing.

"M-Mike! Something's happening to y- *n-ngh-*"

Onyx groaned as he felt something churn in his gut. Not just his stomach but *everything* surrounding it. He just felt so overwhelmingly full. This was further enhanced by a pressure in his belly, an intense sensation of bloating that made him feel his shirt start to ride up his abdomen. His curiosity about himself forced him to look away from Mike and at himself.

His belly had a relatively round growth to it now. It was like the beginnings of a gut, except he could tell that it very much was not one. It didn't have the more fatty appearance that a spontaneous gain in weight should give him. Instead, his skin was also taking on a solid red pigmentation while the texture of it shifted to an almost leathery appearance. And as he looked at his swollen gut for longer he could see the beginnings of greenish protrusions forming from the flesh.

There was still more though. He could feel more pressure across his body, the strange feeling of his skin hardening just a little bit as the leathery texture continued to rise up his body. An even more intense numbness than that in his torso had been in his arms and legs, and he was already

bearing witness to the changes in his limbs rapidly mirroring those that he saw in Mike. Fingers and hands shrinking away into nubs that in themselves shrunk away with each passing second. At the same time he could feel his footwear just barely hang off his legs as his feet became nothing but stubs as well.

And all while those green protrusions on his belly got longer and longer, inching upwards on his round tummy and lightly overlapping his shirt. Although he could also see bumps in his shirt begin to form as more spikes seemed to begin to grow on his torso. He could even feel some straining coming from his back as well.

"'s happening to… me too," Onyx strained. His breathing felt weak, and stringing together coherent thoughts was getting harder as the changes overtook his body. His limbs were half their length at this point, and there was this intense swelling in his tongue that was making speaking and breathing hard. Then came this strong *taste* in his mouth, one of watery and sweetness that just overwrote his gustatory and olfactory senses. He could even feel a few hard bits poking out the walls of his mouth as well.

"M-mouth… tasthin'... fruithy…" Onyx said, speech slurring as his tongue fattened.

"E-everythin' feels… fruity," Mike responded. His internals were congested with what his brain had settled on being fruit matter at this point. He could feel his own mouth filling up with that as well as his sense of taste was overwhelmed with the tastes of sweet and juicy feels mixed with mild acidity. Truthfully it made his flustered emotions intensify, although the redness of his cheeks may have been because of his transformation since he was growing seeds on his face.

There was also this vibe that everything around him felt bigger. As if his size was now getting lost, fruity flesh compressing his body with each passing moment. His shoes were dropped to the ground as his feet no longer existed to hold them, and his pants barely hanging on as he only had a quarter of his legs left (and they were *still* shrinking). His arms had suffered the same fate as well, allowing his shirt to slowly slip away to reveal the increasingly fruity appearance his torso had taken on. The top-heaviness of his body had remained, accentuated well by the way his abdomen's diameter shortened with his waist's width shrinking even further. He was taking on a truly triangular form, and with how his seedy skin glistened it was increasingly obvious he was becoming a strawberry.

His shrinking sensation was further enhanced when the space between his neck and head began to disappear. His head seemed to just slowly cave into the top most section of his form, more and more redness overtaking it. A shade of green was forming within his hair as well, follicles merging and thinning as thick fluffy clumps became flat leaves. So many leaves just drooping off

his crown, flopping down over his face and ears and the back of his head. Even the small curl of hair that was usually over his forehead turned into a small leaf.

"Mike, we hath… do… someth'-" Onyx started to plead, but by the end of his sentence his tongue would swell to encompass his whole mouth. If anything it seemed to just *merge* with the walls of the insides of his mouth, and he could feel his lips seem to begin the process of fusing. Then came the constant scattering of his thoughts as stringing together anything coherent became harder. It felt like he barely had a brain to think with anymore!

Then there was his own shrinking. His shoes and jeans slipped off his practically non-existent legs as whatever numbs that remained flattened into more green spines that protruded out where his groin presumably once was. A similar fate seemed to befall his arms as well as once they reached quarter-length they flattened and started to raise upwards. Before his body had a chance to shrink there was also the fact that the multiple spines that were poking out the front and back of his torso finally ripped through his T-shirt, leathery green spikes continuously rising up over his equally textures red skin. But once his form had kick-started its loss in height it would only be a matter of time until his shirt sloughed off his body.

As more and more spikes emerged from him it became increasingly noticeable just how many were creeping up to his face. How many would just tap his cheek or brush up the back of his head. All the while there didn't *seem* to be any spines emerging from his head initially, even if he could feel the leathery texture overwrite his skin. This notion was proven incorrect quite quickly though as the hairs of his mohawk all seemed to merge into each other, keratin shifting to fruit flesh as it all became one thick spine that steadily rose from his head. There was also the fact his entire head was now feeling *so* much smaller than the rest of his body had felt now. Although such things were getting harder to discern as his vision faded, eyes seemingly forcing themselves shut. Onyx tried to keep them open though, and tried to put up some little resistance he still could.

The voice from earlier returns though, and it pierces both his and Mike's minds at the same time yet again. '*Quell your fears for you shall not need them. Accept the blessing I have bestowed upon you despite your ignorant transgression.*'

Onyx had wanted to refute the idea of this being a blessing, but his train of thought was effectively non-existence. His brain had been rendered nothing but the insides of a fruit, and what human resilience that remained was being disseminated into the endocarp of his new body. It didn't take long until resistance faded away into something blissful, something accepting.

The final phase of the duo's transformation was fairly similar between the two of them. The shrinking came to a steady halt at different sizes with the strawberry that was once Mike very

visibly smaller than the dragonfruit that was Onyx. Whatever was left of Mike's head merged into the topmost portion of his plump former-torso, eyes sealing into nothing but seeds while his lips merged into fruity berry flesh. The fate of Onyx's head was mildly similar, the spines practically encompassing his entire head as it shrunk into an almost cylindrical shape that apexed his body. Eyes and mouth sealed shut, and the spine his hair had become was the one that poked out the furthest from his form.

Slowly the branches and vines of the tree slunk away, save for the ones that had connected themselves to the former humans just minutes prior. Those remained connected to the fruit, positions shifting into areas where a stem would be applicable for each new addition to the tree's body. As the plant matter slunk away the shirts that could no longer cling to the bodies of humans dropped to the forest floor, as did Mike's choker and Onyx's collar for they had no neck to encompass.

The new strawberry and dragonfruit had no eyes to witness this. Both of them barely had the thoughts to register that something fell off of them. Especially the former Mike, whose sense of self had been scrubbed relatively quickly as he succumbed to the mindlessness of a fruit pretty easily. The one once known as Onyx still had the faintest of thoughts though, even if they were simple and practically brainwashed.

Because the dragonfruit could now truly register this as a blessing. A gift of simplicity that was granted to it. It had nothing to worry about, nothing to fear. It was nothing but a fruit on a tree. It had no real purpose but to serve the whims of that tree just as every other fruit connected to it must do.

'*A new life has been gifted to the both of you*,' the supposed voice of the tree resonated within the unthinking internals of the fruits. '*There is nothing left to vex yourselves over. All you will ever need will be taken care of here… by me…*'

The very last feeling the dragonfruit had was one of blissful euphoria and complacency. It truly has nothing to fear because it was a part of a greater being…

So as the clothing of two humans got rapidly consumed by the earth, the clearing had once again been scrubbed of any interference. The balance of the ecosystem would remain evermore with two more fruits added to the bounty of this mysterious grove.